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DE RUEHTI #0696 1861634
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 051634Z JUL 06
FM AMEMBASSY TIRANA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4500
INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 2942
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2175
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

C O N F I D E N T I A L TIRANA 000696

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DEPT FOR EUR/SCE (BENEDICT), EUR/SE
ATHENS FOR GRISSETTE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/05/2016
TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [AL](#) [GR](#)
SUBJECT: CHAM PROTESTS MARK 62ND ANNIVERSARY OF LEAVING
GREECE

REF: 05 TIRANA 1676

Classified By: AMBASSADOR MARCIE B. RIES FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (SBU) Several hundred Chams gathered at a rally in Saranda on June 23 to mark the 62nd anniversary of the Chams' expulsion from Greece to Albania. The rally was organized by the "Chameria" association and the Cham-founded Party for Democracy and Integration (PDI). The following day, protesters traveled to Qafe-Bot, a crossing point with Greece, where Chams passed into Albanian territory in 1944 during the exodus from Greece. Press reports estimated the number of participants as high as 10,000, but the actual number was likely much lower.

¶2. (SBU) The protesters laid wreaths on a grave, where reportedly dozens of deported Chams who did not survive the journey to Albania were buried. Participants called for the granting of Greek citizenship and restitution of their confiscated properties. PDI Chair Tahir Muhedini said at Qafe-Bot the issue was not only between Albania and Greece and called for EU and U.S. intervention. SP MP Shpetim Idrizi, of Cham origin, was the only mainstream politician participating in the visit to Qafe-Bot.

¶3. (SBU) On June 25, press reported on a letter from the European Commission, responding to an earlier letter from the PDI to the Commission. The Commission's reply stated it was aware of the Cham issue, in particular the issue of Cham property rights in Greece; however, the Commission believed it was a bilateral matter between Greece and Albania, and urged dialogue between the two to find a solution. Media reported on July 5 that the Chams have sent a letter to Archbishop Janullatos, the Greek-born head of the Albanian Orthodox Church, calling for recognition of the Chams as an ethnic minority in Greece. We are now seeking a copy of this letter.

BACKGROUND ON CHAMS

¶4. (SBU) Chams are ethnic Albanians who lived in northwestern Greece. Near the end of World War II, between 20,000 and 40,000 Chams were expelled as "fascist collaborators" and resettled in Albania. Chams and their descendants in Albania have organized protests to demand Greek citizenship and compensation for the loss of property. Protests have occurred in conjunction with visits of Greek leaders to Albania; in November 2005, Greek President Papoulias cut short a visit to Albania and canceled a meeting with his Albanian counterpart, citing security concerns arising from Cham protests (see reftel).

15. (C) COMMENT: Chams are eager to involve the U.S. and EU in their attempt to gain Greek citizenShip and compensation for lost property, particularly since the GoA, for fear of straining delicate relations with Greece, has been unwilling to go much beyond President Moisiu's October 2004 call for a bilateral experts' dialogue to resolve the issues which his then-Greek counterpart StedfanmpmuloSbahQad "closed." While Embassy Officials meet during the time with American Chams to help them meet the goal of being able to avoid becoming involved in political activities which remains highly relevant 20 years on. END COMMENT. QRIES